

# Care facility in danger of shuttering

Sumter

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## Trinity Place backers frozen in procedures, building renovations

By **LESLIE CANTU**

Item Senior Staff Writer

A residential care facility for people with HIV/AIDS faces the possibility of closing down before it ever opens, and its backers are pointing fingers at a state agency for dragging out the licensing process.

Stephen Barrineau had planned to open Trinity Place, a 70-bed facility located in the former Eastern Star Home on North Main Street, in February, thinking he could open one wing as cosmetic renovations proceeded in the others, but he's had to put the opening on hold until more substantial renovations to the 50-plus-year facility are complete.

Without residents, the facility isn't generating income. Without a license, it can't access the grants it's lined up. Barrineau said

the facility's financial plan included three months of operating expenses to get it through the startup phase, but the facility is now entering the fourth month with no license in sight.

Local and state officials, though, say they cannot license a facility on the assumption that it will eventually meet regulations.

County Administrator Bill Noonan said local building officials enforce the rules; they don't create them.

"We want this to open up just as badly as you do. We recognize the need. We know where we are statistically," he said, referring to Sumter County's fourth-place ranking among South Carolina counties for HIV cases.

Curtis Loftis, director of the lieutenant governor's Office on Aging, attempted to get the licensing process back on track during a meeting Friday.

Loftis said he called the meeting of Trinity Place employees, contractors, county officials, building department officials and

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## TRINITY PLACE

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advocates to improve communication and see what could be done within the law to fast-track the licensing for the much-needed facility.

"It was our hope that by having everyone there this morning, we'd all be on the same page," he said.

But frustration with the local building officials and the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, the licensing agency, popped up in some attendee's critiques.

Colleen Yates, who lost a son to AIDS, called the "nitpicking" of regulations ridiculous.

"As I sit here, I am extremely angry about what I'm hearing about this facility," she said.

People are dying as the facility struggles to open, Yates said.

"It is time for somebody to knock a few heads," she said.

Vickie Williams, the regional long-term care ombudsman with Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments, said DHEC should have a clear methodology it

uses to inspect facilities and should have come in from day one with an inspection sheet so Barrineau could see in writing what needed to be done to the building.

"This is a beautiful facility. It needs to be open," she said.

Barrineau said DHEC inspectors started requiring additional work after building renovations had begun and that local building officials started requiring architectural and engineering plans for what he considers maintenance-type work.

He asked the building officials, who sat surrounded by more than 30 Trinity Place employees and advocates, if the building department would levy fines for work that had begun without a permit.

Plans Examiner Cleston Bridges said the building department has shown flexibility with Trinity Place — by the letter of the law, it should have issued stop-work orders when it discovered unpermitted work being done, he said.

The building department can't issue a certificate of completion — the document DHEC needs before the agency will issue a license — if



the work isn't complete, Bridges said. Doing so could be considered malfeasance in office, he said.

And while local officials will work as quickly as possible on the certificate, Bridges said, "beyond that is the point where we can't go."

No one representing DHEC attended the meeting, but spokesman Adam Myrick said the agency will issue a letter today detailing the remaining handful of items that must be completed.

"We have consistently applied the appropriate regulations to this facility regarding changes that need to be made," he said via e-mail.

Myrick also pointed to a page on the DHEC Web site that links

to community residential care facility regulations, licensing procedures, frequently asked questions, miscellaneous information and a self-inspection checklist.

Barrineau asked the building officials, on behalf of the employees who've volunteered their time to update the facility and those living with HIV/AIDS who are waiting on beds, to find a way to issue the certificate of completion.

"I ask you, search and see if there's any loopholes, please sir. ... We can't stand another week or two. We cannot," he said.

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